

Chapter 9

Assigning Strategic Roles in Collaborative Writing to Promote Student Engagement

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A. THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE

In higher education, collaborative writing remains positively important, as it provides students with opportunities to transform from completing tasks solitarily to engaging in socially interactive discussion. Collaborative writing is understood as a process in which two or more students jointly construct a single written text, and this final text production reflects their shared contributions (Chu, 2025). Although collaborative writing benefits to enhance writing skills and more efficient practice (Valizadeh, 2022; Pramudiharjo et al., 2025), its implementation in EFL classroom can be challenging. One of the complex challenges is student engagement in collaborative writing activity. A previous study confirmed that student engagement is closely linked to students' involvement in classroom activities and becomes essential component of effective learning process (Norazmi et al., 2016; Nor et al., 2026). However, differences in motivation, initiative, or ability can create disparities in writing group participation, characterized by some students dominating group interactions while others position themselves as passive roles. In the

context of collaborative responsibility in writing, the central challenge concerns not only group formation but also imbalanced participation among group members.

A practical response to promote more balanced participation in collaborative writing is through the strategic role assignment, whereby specific responsibilities are deliberately distributed among group members. According to Byrnes and Manchón (2014), writing constitutes a multifaceted cognitive process shaped by learners, instructors, tasks, and resources (cited in Wang et al., 2025), highlighting the need for role assignment to help coordinate these elements in collaborative writing. Such task distribution is essential because group members are required to collect, organize, manage, and communicate information throughout the process (Last & Neveu, 2019; McCahan et al., 2015). Among the findings of Zhang's (2025) study, which explored how the cognitive, social, and affective engagement interacted with one another, for example, it was revealed that learners engaged in collaborative writing were more attentive to language use and purposefully encouraged to notice and elaborate on linguistic problems. This illustrates that role assignment can help create supportive interaction in classroom practice by giving individual students a clear opportunity to make contributions during collaborative writing activities.

Another study's finding also underscored the importance of collaborative writing commitment form as one strategy to cope with social challenges in collaborative writing (Anggraeni et al., 2025). This form specified members' roles and responsibilities, and it consisted of several parts, including course and group details, members' agreed roles and responsibilities at each writing stage, signatures, and the date of commitment. Nevertheless, although students are grouped together, dividing roles does not guarantee equal participation (Hasbi, 2026). For example, research on collaborative wiki writing concluded that a group of L2 writers consistently exhibited greater participation in the discussion mode than in the editing mode (Elabdali & Arnold, 2020). Overall, the evidence indicates that the potential of role assignment can serve as a pedagogical intervention for addressing student engagement in

collaborative writing, but its effectiveness depends on how it is designed and implemented.

B. THE PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Effective role assignment to promote student engagement emphasizes on more than specifying the workload among group members; it allows students to enact their roles and responsibilities during the writing process. The following subsections propose three practical solutions for implementing role assignment effectively in EFL collaborative writing.

Explicitly Assigning Specific and Complementary Roles

As a group, establishing good communication is the key to a successful task completion. Collaborative writing shifts classroom learning by involving students as active contributors who work with peers and complete shared tasks while instructors as facilitators manage, monitor, and assess students' collaborative work (Zulfikar & Aulia, 2020). In this context, instructors introduce complementary roles that can target both the quality of the final writing product and the collaborative process, allowing students to negotiate and decide their roles among themselves. Roles are described as the designated functions that guide members' contributions and group interaction by dividing tasks and responsibilities while ensuring both interdependence and each member accountability (Putzeys & De Wever, 2021). In addition, Last and Neveu (2019) summarize student roles within a collaborative writing group, as presented below.

Table 1. Collaborative writing roles

Role	Description
Writer	A person who is responsible for writing a portion of the content
Consultant	A person who is external to the project and has no ownership or responsibility for producing content but who offers content and process-related feedback (peer reviewers outside the team; instructor)
Editor	A person who is responsible for the overall content production of the writers, and can make both style and content changes; typically has ownership of the content production
Reviewer	A person, internal or external, who provides specific content feedback but is not responsible for making changes
Team Leader	A person who is part of the team and may fully participate in authoring and reviewing the content, but who also leads the team through the processes, planning, rewarding, and motivating.
Facilitator	A person external to the team who leads the team through processes but doesn't give content related feedback.

Further supporting this view on role assignment, multiple roles in collaborative writing are identified, including writer, consultant, reviewer, editor, and team leader (Baecker et al.,1993; Lowry et al. 2004; Posner & Baecker, 1992, as cited in Nykopp et al., 2019). Such role differentiation represents complementary responsibilities: drafting ideas into coherent text (the writer), contributing to the writing process without directly drafting the text (the consultant), providing feedback (the reviewer), revising and refining text (the editor), and leading and coordinating collaborative writing process (the team leader). To support students in carrying out these assigned roles, a collaborative writing commitment form can be prepared before beginning the writing task. As suggested by Anggraeni et al (2025), this form covers members’ roles and responsibilities and is used to monitor individual contributions at different stages of writing.

Rotating Roles and Scaffolding

Roles may be rotated so that each member has opportunities to various learning experiences and participation. As illustrated by Reifenberg (2025) through the rotating project manager (RPM) model, role rotation promotes leadership skill and evenly distributes responsibilities among group members; this process is executed for a specific period of time, and this role rotates throughout the project.

Following this model, five practical tips can be implemented: clarifying the objectives of role rotation, establishing a rotation schedule, regularly updating the progress, providing support for unresolved problems, and recognizing students' contributions. In a similar vein, role rotation also encourages student engagement in collaborative writing process. For example, the first-author role among group members was rotated by handling the final editing and submission (Ness et al., 2014, as cited in Welton et al., 2023). Collett et al (2020) reported that rotating the roles of leader, mentor, supporter, and editor among the three female academics built their confidence and strengthened group cohesion by recognizing each member's contribution. They added that the practice made the group more aware of power dynamics as they collaborated on writing and publication.

Scaffolding is an instructional strategy that significantly increases students' writing competence and engagement; it helps regulate and sustain group engagement with the instructor's guidance (Abejuela, 2014; Wang, 2024). Additionally, it is explained as a temporary assistance needed to facilitate learning progress, which is gradually withdrawn as students gain sufficient understanding and independence (Lajoie, 2025; Saksopin et al., 2025). A study of online collaborative writing investigated EFL learners of varying proficiency levels participated in peer scaffolding throughout the pre-writing, writing, and post-writing stages by discussing language production, questioning language use, and resolving grammatical and lexical issues (Saksopin et al., 2025). The language functions observed included acknowledging, agreeing, disagreeing, elaborating, eliciting, greeting, justifying, questioning, requesting, stating, and suggesting (Li & Kim, 2016, as cited in Saksopin et al., 2025). This study concludes that students demonstrate diverse peer-scaffolding behaviors in collaborative writing by contributing their knowledge and skills to support one another based on their writing expertise. Overall, in collaborative writing, both role rotation and scaffolding can operate as complementary strategies: the former provides students with opportunities to participate in unfamiliar responsibilities, and the latter guides them to perform their tasks successfully.

Monitoring Participation and Interaction

The implementation of collaborative writing not only promotes student engagement but also directs instructors to monitor students' active participation and contribution during the work. Instructors view themselves to serve dual roles as facilitator and assessor while emphasizing that collaboration improves students' research, organizational, and argumentation skills (Taye et al., 2025; Yusuf et al., 2019). An experimental study comparing the effects of collaborative and individual writing practices found that students receiving instructors' feedback in a collaborative writing group performed significantly better than those receiving direct corrective feedback in individual writing (Valizadeh, 2022). This result suggests that instructor feedback play a vital role in enhancing writing performance among students working in a collaborative group by guiding them to identify areas for improvement. While participating as a team, students are able to recognize their weaknesses, negotiate, and then improve the quality of their writing.

Furthermore, based on the educators' interviews, collaborative writing task was a strategic approach arranged by the educators that initiated the collaboration among groups of students to brainstorm, organize ideas, and compose their writing while learning from the multiple perspectives from their peers (Taye et al., 2025). Similar to any collaborative activity, successful collaborative writing requires all members to focus on a shared objective. Wang's (2024) study reported that in order to promote student engagement in group, students were encouraged to apply regulating strategies (e.g. exchanging ideas and responding to others' feedback) and maintaining strategies (e.g. asking for advice, pushing forward discussions, and being polite) while instructors guided them in recognizing avoidance strategies (e.g. being reluctant to revise others' texts and keeping silent in discussions) as important parts of group work rather than reflecting resistance to collaboration. From some of these previous studies, students engaged in collaborative writing tend to move from working independently to coordinating with their peers, with instructors monitoring comments from peers and giving feedback when necessary.

C. THE FUTURE DIRECTION

This chapter highlights student engagement as one contemporary challenge in collaborative writing and underscores the implementation of role assignment as its practical solution. The strategies are applied through explicitly assigning roles and responsibilities, role rotation, scaffolding, and participation monitoring. Future research directions could explore how cognitive and social factors influence role assignment among students in collaborative writing groups. Cognition focuses on mental process dealing with knowledge construction, and social activities relate to mutual interaction among students, instructors, learning activities, and so on (Wang, 2024). Because students' roles may be rotated, these sociocognitive dimensions are considerably important to take into consideration when motivating and involving students in collaborative writing activity.

Future research could also integrate role assignment with digital writing platform. An example is the utilization of Google Docs for collaborative writing which also encompasses instructors' feedback (Valizadeh, 2022). This technological support, such as Google Docs, encourages interaction, participation, and provision of progress monitoring that is accessible to both students and instructors. The other technology may be utilized, including WhatsApp group messaging (Hasbi & Maulani, 2021) to maintain discussion, share information, as well as coordinate within group members.

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